

Avalanche!

Every year thousands of tourists travel to Colorado to ski. Skiing is one of Colorado's main tourist attractions. It's hard to imagine anything better than a beautiful day of skiing. Most people visit Colorado's ski parks for their vacations. However, many skiers enjoy skiing Colorado's backcountry. Skiing the backcountry is free, adventurous, and a lot of fun! It can also be dangerous due to back-county avalanches.

More than 90,000 avalanches occur every year in the U.S., mainly between the months of November and March. Since 1950, when avalanche deaths were first recorded, these snow slides have killed 462 people. More than 80 percent of those deaths occurred in the backcountry--unpopulated, remote areas outside ski-resort boundaries. Avalanches are caused when many layers of snow pile up, and a part of the packed snow breaks off and begins to slide down the mountain. Did you know that a person talking or a vibration from a train could trigger an avalanche?

Chris Lavell and Howard Wormuth recently went skiing on the off-trail slopes of Aspen, Colorado. As the two made their way down the mountainside, a huge white cloud suddenly rumbled overhead. In seconds, this avalanche, a large mass of tumbling snow, hurled toward them. The slide missed Lavell, but buried Wormuth--suffocating him beneath tons of snow. Wormuth didn't have a chance to escape. He died that day due to severe head injuries loss of air.

Should people be allowed to ski in Colorado's backcountry or should they be restricted to skiing in ski parks?